

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing  
Thursday, February 23rd, 2017  
DDS, **DMHAS** & DPH

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am here to comment on H.B. No. 7027 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019, And Making Appropriations Therefor.

I am Valerie Williams the Executive Director for Keystone House in Norwalk and I live in Stratford. I sat at my table this week trying to put together my thoughts and feelings about this state budget. I am frustrated, tired and feeling hopeless and helpless. I am having the same feelings as the clients that come to Keystone. Keystone is a nonprofit organization, we contract with the state of CT DMHAS , for Group Home , Supervised Apartments, Community Support Programs and a Social Rehabilitation program. The clients that come to Keystone are adults with persistent mental illness. They are on state aid and the services we provide are not covered by any private insurance. The majority of our clients do not have families that can support or care for them, unfortunately one of the many side effect of a major mental illness is alienation from families and friends.

The Governor has proposed combining three grant funding line items, Grants for Mental Health Services, Grants for Substance Abuse Services and Employment Opportunities, into one and then cutting the combined line by \$4.7 million in each fiscal year. We need to remember that those lines were also cut by a combined \$4.1 million in the FY17 holdbacks, which the Governor has proposed annualizing.

What I want you to understand is that after the FY17 Holdbacks, which included a \$3.1 million or 15% cut to Grants to Substance Abuse services, programs that served people with the most significant challenges closed.

When we received our funding cut letters in August we quickly scrambled, made immediate cutbacks and in September laid off 3 full time staff and eliminated two administrative positions. As per our newly amended DMHAS contract, we cut program hours for our apartment program from 7 days a week including holidays to just Monday thru Friday. Clients have missed doctor appointments and are spending more and more time sitting in their apartments watching TV and this is not a good thing.

Further cuts to grant funding in the DMHAS system cannot be absorbed or sustained and will result in further layoffs, program closures, and service reductions.

I am a member of the nonprofit alliance and we, as a group, have shared our information, and our challenges in providing services to our most needy with these unannounced, after the fiscal year starts, financial cuts. As a group, we have documented the cost effective, high-quality services provided by nonprofits in the community and how we can be part of the solution to our state budget problems. CT nonprofits have a long, solid history of knowing their clients, their communities, their neighborhoods and working together with all stakeholders to provide high quality, cost effective services. I believe the State of CT can continue to provide high quality and cost effective services for our citizens by shifting state-provided services to the nonprofit system.

Thank you for your time and attention.